

21
PASTORAL VISITING.

THE
SECOND CHARGE

TO THE

Clergy of the Protestant Episcopal Church

IN THE

DIOCESE OF IOWA,

DELIVERED IN

CHRIST CHURCH, BURLINGTON,

ON WEDNESDAY, MAY 30th, 1860.

BY

THE RT. REV. HENRY W. LEE, D. D.,

BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE.

PRINTED BY ORDER OF THE DIOCESAN CONVENTION.

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CHARGE.

MY DEAR AND REVEREND BRETHREN :

In addressing to you my Second Charge, it is my purpose to speak of the *Pastoral Work in the Church of Christ*,—a subject peculiarly appropriate for such an occasion, when the Pastors of a Diocese are assembled together to confer with their Bishop, and with the representatives of their flocks, upon those things which pertain to His kingdom who is the gracious Bishop and Shepherd of our souls. I am influenced in this selection by my conviction that the subject is too much overlooked on such occasions, and that it is not sufficiently considered by the Clergy generally in the discharge of their sacred duties.

The faithful minister of Jesus Christ is faithful both as Preacher and Pastor. The two must combine “to form the completeness of the sacred office, as expounded in our Ordination services and in scriptural illustrations.” A pious writer, himself a Pastor, justly exclaims : “How little can a stated appearance in public answer to the lowest sense of such terms as Shepherd, Watchman, Overseer, Steward!—terms, which import not a mere general superintendence over the flock, charge, or household, but an acquaintance with their individual wants, and a distribution suitable to the occasion ; without which, instead of “taking heed to the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made us overseers,” we can scarcely be said to take the oversight of it at all. This interesting relation cheers our toil with a new tide of spiritual affections, and exercises our Christian wisdom and faith, in seeking of the Lord an “open door,”

in prudently improving opportunities of instruction, and in adapting our mode to the different classes of our people."

In speaking of the *Pastoral Work*, I have chiefly in view PASTORAL VISITING, including, of course, such domestic and personal instruction, exhortation, and warning, as may be practicable and expedient under the circumstances in which the Pastor may find families and individuals. And, in pursuing the subject, I am prepared to remark,

That where the Pastoral Work is neglected, there, as a general rule, the flock will be scattered and driven away.

In this connection, how solemn and admonitory are those words of the Lord by His prophet* Jeremiah, which are so appropriate to the present occasion, and which, indeed, suggested the subject upon which I am now addressing you :

"Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the Lord. Therefore, thus saith the Lord God of Israel, against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the Lord."*

In attending to the subject, thus presented, it will be proper to ascertain, at the outset, the precise meaning of the word *Pastors*, and also what is implied in their *visiting* their flocks.

The Hebrew word translated *Pastors* means, literally, *Shepherds*, those who feed flocks, and make all the provision for them which they need, caring for them by day and by night, and protecting them from the dangers to which they are exposed, giving special attention to the tender lambs, and to all such as are least able to provide for themselves.

The phrase *to visit*, as used in the language of the Prophet just quoted, means to look after, as a shepherd looks after his flock. It sometimes signifies to visit in order to review or examine, or to look after the condition and interests of those visited; and in this sense it is often used in the Scriptures.

* Jeremiah XXIII, 1, 2.

So that Ministers are Shepherds, entrusted with the care of flocks, which they must *visit* from time to time, that they may look after their spiritual interests, and make themselves acquainted with their spiritual condition. And our proposition is, that the flocks will ordinarily be scattered and driven away, if the Shepherds neglect to visit them.

That such a result should follow such neglect, will appear to be natural and legitimate, when we consider more particularly *what Pastoral Visiting is*, and *the advantages which attend it*.

It was the charge of St. Paul to the Elders of the Church at Ephesus, when they met him at Miletus, "Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." This taking heed to *all the flock* must imply, not only a general oversight, but a particular acquaintance also with the circumstances and wants of individuals; and this acquaintance cannot be had except by faithful Pastoral Visiting, which must extend to the whole flock. Indeed, Pastoral Visiting may be defined as *personal intercourse on the part of the Pastor with those who are placed under his care*; and hence it is plain that faithfulness in preaching and faithfulness in pastoral duties are not one and the same thing, though they ought never to be separated. Both are to be regarded as parts and as essential parts of the ministerial office; though it hardly admits of a question that it is more difficult to be faithful as a Pastor than as a Preacher. In preaching, the truths and precepts of the word of God are publicly set forth, and the people are exhorted, admonished, and warned to lay hold on the hope set before them, and to flee from the wrath to come; while "the Pastoral Work is the personal application of the pulpit ministry to the proper individualities of the people."* The Preacher regards his congregation in the aggregate, and addresses them in general terms; while the faithful Pastor looks upon his people severally as "having a distinct and

* Bridges.

separate claim upon his attention, cares, and anxiety ; urging each of them, as far as possible, to the concerns of eternity ; and commending to their hearts a suitable exhibition and offer of salvation. For this purpose he must acquaint himself with their situation, habits, character, state of heart, peculiar wants, and difficulties, that he may give to each of them a portion in due season.”* All stand in need of his personal superintendence, and without it there will be a great lack of true spiritual prosperity. So that, as far as is possible, the Pastor should have a personal acquaintance with the members of his flock, and be able to call his sheep by name. This is a characteristic of that Great Shepherd of the sheep who laid down His life for them, for He himself has said, “I am the good Shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.”

In some instances, this personal acquaintance of the Pastor with his flock is rendered almost if not altogether impracticable by the extent of the fold to which he is appointed. On this point the distinguished Baxter has remarked, that as pastors are commanded to take heed to *all* the flock, it is plainly implied that flocks must ordinarily be no greater than the pastors are capable of overseeing, or taking heed to. “God,” he continues, “will not lay upon us natural impossibilities: he will not bind men to leap up to the moon, to touch the stars, or to number the sands of the sea. If the pastoral office consists in overseeing all the flock, then surely the number of souls under the care of each Pastor must not be greater than he is able to take such heed to as is here required.”† But it is not unfrequently the case that this rule is unavoidably departed from, and pastors find themselves in charge of flocks so numerous that it is impossible for them to give that personal attention to individuals, or to have that personal acquaintance with them, which are so desirable and important where such a peculiar and interesting relation subsists. In such cases there is not ordinarily as much real happiness and satisfaction in each other, on

* Bridges.

† The Reformed Pastor.

the part of pastors and people, as where there is a mutual personal acquaintance, and where the people often see their pastors in their own dwellings, and have full and familiar converse with them upon spiritual and eternal things. The happiest pastors and flocks are undoubtedly those whose lot is cast in rural districts, where there is a sufficiency of numbers and means to sustain the ministrations of the sanctuary, but where there is not such a multitude as to oppress and bewilder those who are placed over them in the Lord, and who toil on day after day, and year after year, in the painful consciousness of an utter inability to meet the demands which are made upon their time and their services. Those pastors of small flocks who are sometimes tempted to desire a more numerous charge, should bear in mind that in the event of the fulfilment of such a desire, they would be forced to say "farewell" to much of the peace and comfort which they now enjoy, and in the place of the familiarity between minister and people, which gives such a charm to country parishes, be obliged to accustom themselves to feel almost like strangers in the presence of their own flocks, and to forego, in a great measure, the valued privilege of an intimate acquaintance with those to whom they break the bread of life. That Pastor has the most enviable lot who answers the Poet's description of the "Village Preacher," whose

"Modest mansion rose
Near yonder copse, where once the garden smiled;"

where,

"Remote from towns, he ran his godly race.

Unskilful he to fawn, or seek for power,
By doctrines fashioned to the varying hour;
Far other aims his heart had learned to prize,
More bent to raise the wretched than to rise."

I cannot refrain from adding those other exquisite lines which are so descriptive of many rural pastors and flocks,

particularly of those in connection with England's noble Church:

“At church, with meek and unaffected grace,
His looks adorned the venerable place;
Truth from his lips prevailed, with double sway;
And fools, who came to scoff, remained to pray.
The service past, around the pious man,
With ready zeal each honest rustic ran;
Even children followed with endearing wile,
And plucked his gown, to share the good man's smile;
His ready smile a parent's warmth expressed,
Their welfare pleased him, and their cares distressed;
To them his heart, his love, his griefs were given,
But all his serious thoughts had rest in heaven.”

Such delightful scenes can only be witnessed where the Pastor knows his flock, and where the faithful ministrations of years have secured for him their respect and confidence. Wherever, from the extent of the flock, a mutual personal acquaintance between the minister and his people can be only slight and partial, he deserves to be pitied rather than blamed; for he pursues his work under great disadvantages. Still, even he must be diligent in his pastoral labors, devoting himself systematically to the visiting of his flock, and trusting to their kind consideration for all seeming neglect of this most important duty. A congregation will not allow themselves to be scattered or driven away by such seeming neglect, if there is an evident desire on the part of the minister to be faithful and thorough in this and in every other department of his holy office. But if there is an actual and unnecessary neglect in this particular, it has a direct tendency to weaken the bond which unites the Pastor and people, and to make them uneasy and discontented under his pulpit ministrations. And hence it is true, as a general rule, that where the Pastoral Work is neglected, the flock will be scattered and driven away.

That such an effect should follow such a cause, will appear to be almost a matter of course, when we consider more minutely *the advantages which attend Pastoral Visiting.*

One great advantage is, *the substantial aid which the Pastor receives from personal intercourse with his people, in his pulpit ministrations.*

It is a true remark that "he who hopes to discharge the duties of the pulpit ably, appropriately, seasonably, and to the greatest advantage of his flock, *without being much with them*, entertains a hope which is perfectly unreasonable, and will certainly be disappointed."* By a judicious improvement of this intercourse, the Pastor may receive instruction from the poorest and the meanest of his flock. Teachers, to be successful, must be constant learners. They must not content themselves with present attainments in knowledge, but make diligent use of every facility for its increase; otherwise they will prove but indifferent instructors, in whatever department they may be engaged. This is pre-eminently true of religious teachers, whose instructions have reference to the lives and characters of their people. To be at all successful in their work of feeding the flock, they must *know* the flock, and adapt their instructions to its peculiar wants. It has been said by some experienced Pastor, that "the sermons made in our parishes differ from those that are thought out or collected in the study. If they are less abstract, they are more pointed and experimental. We mark the precise evil requiring caution, the deficiency calling for exhortation, the circumstances needing advice, the distress or perplexity looking for consolation and encouragement: and thus the pastoral preaching gives a local and instructive application to our pulpit ministry." The saintly George Herbert, in his admirable delineation of "The Country Parson," while remarking that "the chief and top of his knowledge consists in the Book of books, the storehouse and magazine of life and comfort, the Holy Scriptures," does not fail to speak of what he calls "accessory knowledges," one of which is a knowledge of the peculiar condition and circumstances of the people. "If," says he, "a shepherd know not which grass will bane, or which not, how is he fit to be a shepherd? Wherefore the parson hath thoroughly canvassed all the particulars of human actions, at least all those which he observeth are most incident to his parish."

*Professor Miller's Letters.

In the ordinary avocations of life, and in professional business, success depends very much upon practical experience. So far as the learned professions are concerned, reading and study are indispensable; but who does not know that mere theoretical knowledge is of very little worth, unless connected with practical experience? So “without that experience, which can only be obtained in pastoral practice, the most scriptural statements, like the promiscuous application of medical science, will be inapplicable, and proportionably defective.” It often happens that learned discourses are almost wholly lost upon the hearers, for want of that practical knowledge of men and things, on the part of ministers, which comes only from familiar contact with them in the daily walks of life. Ministers must preach to the experience of their people, or they will preach in vain; and the skill or ability to preach thus must be gained by that pastoral intercourse, the importance of which I am now endeavoring to set forth.

Another advantage of Pastoral Visiting is *the securing the confidence and affection of the people.*

That Pastor can have little influence over his flock who has no place in their hearts. He may inspire respect for his talents, and excite a species of fear by the sacredness of his office and the staidness of his manners; but confidence and affection are quite distinguishable from respect and fear; and they must be gained by a faithful performance of the Pastoral Work. “I am too backward,” said the celebrated John Rogers, “to private visiting of neighbors at their houses, which neglect is very injurious; for from this cause their love to me cannot be so great as it would be, nor am I so well acquainted with their particular states, and therefore cannot speak so fully to them as I might.” It is a remark of Archbishop Secker that “a chief reason why we have so little hold upon our people is that we converse so little with them as watchmen over their souls.”

What has now been said on this point is especially true with reference to the poor. They are particularly dependent upon pastoral care and oversight; and that Pastor

who neglects the poor, neglects those who have the first claim upon his attention and ministrations. If a minister of Christ may have any ambition, let it be the holy ambition to be known, and spoken of, and remembered, as the especial friend of the poor. But the poor cannot be reached from the pulpit alone. It has been justly observed that "the orbit of the preacher, however regular, sheds but a scanty light over the poor man's dwelling. A pulpit ministration may command attention and respect; but except the preacher convert himself into a Pastor, descending from the pulpit to the cottage, and in Christian simplicity "becoming all things to all men," there will be nothing that fastens on the affections—no bands of love." The people, and particularly the poorer portion, cannot love an unknown and untried friend; and confidence without love is an anomaly. Pastors should therefore be much among the poor, especially when they are sick or afflicted. I am far from the opinion that it is more difficult to be personally faithful to the poor than to the rich; but still if any must be neglected, let it be those who are the best able to take care of themselves, rather than those who are most dependent upon the ministry for sympathy, consolation, and instruction. That Pastor who secures the confidence and affection of the poor, while by no means neglecting the other classes of his congregation, gains a point of the first importance in the ministerial work. But in order to gain it, he must show that he has real sympathy for the poor, and that his heart is with the masses of the people. And this sympathy must be manifested by frequent intercourse with the poor in the exercise of the Pastoral office. The good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep, has set an example in this respect, as well as in others, which all pastors should imitate. His sympathies were with the multitude, and He was often among the poor and despised; and the consequence was, that "the common people heard Him gladly."

It may also be remarked, in this connection, that Pastoral Visiting from house to house is eminently calculated to secure for the Pastor the affection of the *children* of his Parish.

They are the lambs of the flock ; and they have peculiar claims upon the Shepherd. Jesus was kind and attentive to children, and left the injunction, "Feed my lambs." And how important is it that those who minister in His name should walk in His steps in this particular, and take special heed to the tender lambs in their general oversight of the flocks ! Children are the hope of the Church, to which they are early admitted by Baptism ; and it is a rare if not an impossible thing for pastors to bestow upon them too much time or attention. They should have pastoral supervision and instruction in the Sunday School. They should often assemble for pastoral examination in the Catechism. And they should have pastoral counsels from the pulpit. How does it facilitate all such work, when pastors are accustomed to see the children at their homes, and to speak to them there of the things which pertain to salvation ! Seeing them under such circumstances, children lose much of that fear which they are apt to feel towards ministers, and in the place of it, learn to have for them that love which "casteth out fear," and which prompts them to receive with greater readiness the instructions of the sanctuary.

No Pastor who desires to be eminent for usefulness, will fail to take watchful and tender care of the lambs of his flock. Let him but have *their* love, and the confidence and affection of the *poor*, and he has a hold upon feelings and sympathies which cannot but open the way for great usefulness, and make his lot a pleasant and happy one in the holy and responsible work to which he is called.

It should be added, under this head, that the confidence and affection on the part of the people, which are the result of Pastoral Visiting, are pre-eminently secured by a kind and faithful attention to the *sick* and the *afflicted*.

All orders and classes of mankind are more or less dependent upon human sympathy, especially when the clouds of adversity are hanging over them. It is true there is balm in Gilead and a Physician there, that can heal the wounded spirit, and bind up the broken heart ; but still

there is something in human sympathy which is peculiarly grateful in times of trial and sorrow; and this is particularly the case when the manifestation of sympathy comes from those who bear the sacred office; for then human sympathy and divine consolations meet together; for the Pastor visits his flock as a man of God, and not as a mere earthly friend to offer the consolations of human affection and kindness. He goes to the sick and the afflicted as a messenger from the God of all comfort, to administer "the oil of joy for mourning," and to give "the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." And the faithful Pastor will regard this as one of the most important parts of his appointed work, not undertaking it reluctantly, nor avoiding it as an unwelcome task. He will not wait for a formal request before he finds his way to the chamber of sickness, or to the house of mourning; but hasten thither as soon as he has knowledge of the need of his services; though taking no blame to himself if such knowledge does not come to him, and being often pained at the backwardness of his people in informing him of the afflictive visitations of God's providence; for it is often the case that while special and urgent messages are sent to the physician for the body, the physician for the soul is left to ascertain as he may that his presence is needed at the bedside of the sick; and he is not unfrequently censured for his want of omniscience in not knowing who is sick as soon as the attack commences. But the experienced Pastor, with his knowledge of human nature, will learn to overlook all such discouragements, and do all that in him lies towards a faithful care of the sick within the limits of his parochial cure, and even beyond them, as far as may be possible, and as occasion may require. By thus doing, he will increase his own resources for the ministrations of the pulpit, have his piety deepened and strengthened, and gain more, perhaps, than in any other way, the confidence and affection of his people. And thus there will be on his part, a proportionable increase of influence and usefulness for Christ and His blessed cause and kingdom.

Other advantages of Pastoral Visiting might be named, but those now specified are among the most important, and time would fail us should we undertake to consider them all. But even this brief enumeration is sufficient to show the truth of the proposition, that where the Pastoral Work is neglected, there, as a general rule, the flock will be scattered and driven away. Wherever there is such neglect, there will not only be a lack of the advantages to which we have referred as attending Pastoral Visiting, but in their stead will be experienced the actual disadvantages which must ever attend the ministry of such as fail to visit their flocks; which disadvantages will consist, in part, of a want of adaptedness in the ministrations of the pulpit; and in the absence, on the part of the people, of that confidence and affection which are so essential to all parochial success and prosperity. Augustine calls those ministers who neglect to take care of the sick and the afflicted *desolators*, instead of *consolators*; and it may be said of all who neglect the Pastoral Work generally, that they are *desolators of the flock*; and that however learned, or able, or eloquent, or faithful they may be in the pulpit, if they are unfaithful as Pastors, and do not visit their flocks, they are not pastors after God's own heart; and, in one way or another, He will visit upon them the evil of their doings: in the scattering of the sheep, in the loss of ministerial influence and usefulness, or in their dissatisfaction and unhappiness in the office which they have undertaken. Such pastors should ponder well those words of the Lord by His prophet Ezekiel: "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe yon with the wool, ye kill them that are fed; but ye feed not the flock. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost;

but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them. And they were scattered because there is no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them. Therefore, O ye shepherds, hear the word of the Lord; thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock: neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them.”*

But let it not be supposed that *all* the woes and admonitions of the word of God are intended for the unfaithful Shepherds. The Flocks may be unfaithful also. They have their own peculiar duties and responsibilities, as well as the Shepherds, and if they fail to discharge them, there are awful denunciations for them likewise. Our present subject, however, does not permit us to dwell upon this theme, though it is one of the highest importance, and one too much overlooked by those who are under pastoral care and instruction. Intending, in due time, to address the Laity of the Diocese, according to the recommendation of one of our General Canons, I will now only add, upon this point, that it should be the desire and endeavor of the people to give every possible encouragement to their Pastors; cheering them by a constant attendance in the house of God; esteeming them very highly in love for their work's sake; providing liberally for their temporal wants; making all due allowance for human infirmity, and the multiplicity of ministerial duties; remembering them in their prayers at the throne of grace; manifesting, by word and deed, that they deeply sympathize with them in all their cares, and duties, and trials; making it evident that they are doers of the word, and not hearers only; bearing in mind that their Pastors watch for their souls, as they

* Ezekiel XXXIV. 2—10.

that must give account; and so improving their ministry that their account may be given with joy, and not with grief.

And now, my dear Brethren,—you who are the appointed Pastors of the Flocks in this wide-spread and needy Diocese,—let me express the hope that the view of the Pastoral Work which has been hastily sketched in this Charge, will meet your cordial approval; and that in this interesting though laborious field you will prove faithful Shepherds of the sheep entrusted to your care. Be diligent in all the duties of the holy office. “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine.” Let the simple truth as it is in Jesus be given to your flocks as that alone by which they can be fed and nourished. Determine anew to know nothing among them save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. Fail not to set Him forth in all His fullness and preciousness as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world. Keep near to the Saviour in prayer; and, as far as possible, pray with your people in your Pastoral Visiting. Turn neither to the right hand nor to the left from the good old paths of that Primitive and Scriptural Church, which, while “Catholic for every truth of God,” is “Protestant,” and forever Protestant, “against every error of man.” Be ever charitable and tolerant towards all who profess and call themselves Christians; but yield not any of those great points of doctrine or of order to which you are sacredly bound by your ordination vows. Let not the sheep of the Lord’s pasture be scattered and driven away by your pastoral neglect. In the expressive words of our Church, in that solemn office by which its chief Pastors are consecrated to their great work, which words may, without impropriety, be accommodated to this occasion, “Be to the flock of Christ shepherds, not wolves; feed them, devour them not; hold up the weak; heal the sick; bind up the broken; bring again the outcasts; seek the lost. Be so merciful, that you be not too remiss; so minister discipline, that you forget not mercy; that when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, you may receive the never-fading crown of glory, through JESUS CHRIST our LORD. Amen.”